

The Son, the Beloved

Mark 1:4-11

What does it mean that Jesus is the Son, the Beloved? I am a lover of history and I enjoy watching documentaries that tell of how things use to be. So let me tell you what I think I know about fathers and their sons. 1) Most fathers want their firstborn to be a son. (I'm not sure why.) 2) That firstborn son gets a great deal of love, care and instructions from the father. 3) The father wants the son to follow in his footsteps...career, fortune and fame. 4) The father wants the son to do even greater things than the father has done. 5) The son gets a great deal of responsibility – because along with what he inherits, there are the mother, siblings and employees to care for. I believe it is similar for God and Jesus. 1) Jesus, the Beloved Son is the only begotten (the only unique) son of God. 2) Jesus, the Beloved Son has God's great love and care; and knows what the Father knows. 3) Jesus, the Beloved Son has the same power and authority as the Father, and came to do the Father's will in this world that they created and sustain. 4) Jesus, the Beloved Son came to be "God with us" and to show us God's love and care. 5) Jesus, the Beloved Son has a great deal of responsibility – to bring salvation to all.

Mark's story of Jesus' baptism provides the context for understanding everything we recounted about Jesus' ministry and passion, the Beloved Son, in the gospel according to Mark. God's dramatic acknowledgment of Jesus makes it clear that through the words and deeds of Jesus we humans are encountering the enacted intentions of God.

Jesus is the pivot of God's dealings with humanity. John the Baptist helps us understand Jesus in the past, present, and future of God's activity. As the preacher/witness, John links Jesus to God's promises in Israel's past. John's

setting in the wilderness evokes memories of the preparation of the people of Israel for entrance into the Promised Land. John also points forward to God's imminent intervention in human history to bring a new hope to humanity. Into the wilderness of our own broken lives and our own bleeding world erupts the promise of a baptism of new life. Poised like John's generation between a troubled past and an unprecedented future, our proper response should be confession, repentance, and hopeful expectation.

At the climax of our scripture Jesus is declared by God to be God's Son, the Beloved. At that moment the heavens were ripped open. Our brothers and sisters of the Eastern Orthodox tradition say through God's claiming of Jesus, the veiled mystery of God has now been made manifest and available. Karl Barth proposed that God's claiming of Jesus in this story summarizes the essence of the gospel: the astonishing claim that God does not will to remain hidden in the heights of heaven but descends to the depths of earthly life in order to be seen and heard by us finite creatures.

The naming of Jesus as "Son" is seen in many places and ways in the Gospel of Mark. At the transfiguration, "This is my Son, the Beloved" is repeated by a divine voice ([Mark 9:7](#)). The title is so dangerous that the unclean spirits who recognize Jesus' identity must keep it secret ([Mark 3:11; 5:7](#)). At the trial it is Jesus' acceptance of the title "Son of God" that fatally convicts him of blasphemy ([Mark 14:61-62](#)). The phrase is echoed in the human and public confession of the centurion at the cross ([Mark 15:39](#)). Here again a veil, this time that of the temple rather than the sky, is ripped and Jesus gives back to God the spirit that he had received. Golgotha confirms the title proclaimed at the Jordan. God's hailing of Jesus as "Son" was Jesus' entrance onto the way that led to the cross, the inexorable journey that defines what "Son" means.

The cross reveals that the sonship declared at Jesus' baptism involves obedient suffering. Jesus voluntarily joined the ranks of penitent sinners; not because he sinned, but according to another gospel writer, to fulfill all righteousness. This trajectory continued throughout Jesus' ministry as he had to accept multiple forms of suffering. In fact, Mark's notorious "messianic secret" is the scandal that the Messiah must suffer, even to death. Therefore the victory of resurrection and anticipated return is inseparable from the obedient suffering; the crown cannot be had without the cross.

Jesus' baptism did more than initiate the beloved Son's career of obedient sufferer and Son; but also Jesus was empowered by the Spirit. The Spirit empowered Jesus' potent public ministry with its exercise of power over demons, sin, the law, and even nature. Jesus received the Spirit in order to pass it on. If our baptism involves a participation in Jesus' baptism, and if Jesus' baptism initiates his ministry of suffering obedience, then our baptism must include a similar acceptance of self-denial. The path that baptism opens is a road typified by bearing one's own cross, and of saving one's life only by losing it (Mark 8:34-35). **Lee Barrett**

The Spirit is the real substance of God acting in creation and redemption and final reconciliation. The Spirit fills us in church and then drives us from church (as it drove Jesus from the Jordan to the wilderness). There, outside the walls, we wrestle with the beasts and pray for ministering angels.

The text describes a ritual of confession, repentance, and forgiveness. Whether we are sophisticates from the big city or bumpkins from the countryside, we know that confession is good for the soul. When we confess and repent, John declared that Jesus, the Beloved Son, has the authority to baptize with the Holy Spirit. In the chapters that follow, we will see Jesus act out that authority—the authority to teach, the authority to heal and cast

out demons, the authority to heal. Jesus' authority is the authority of the humble one, and his humility is the (true) humility of the one to whom all authority belongs. And Jesus gives that same Spirit to us.

The same God and the same Spirit proclaim us Children of God at our baptisms and empower us. We too want to balance the authority that can unashamedly claim that Jesus Christ is Lord and the humility that knows that he is Lord of all creation, and not just the church's Lord. Our Lord, but not our Lord alone.

The Spirit allows us, as a church, to forgive one another's sins. The sins we forgive in Christ's name are really forgiven. But they are forgiven in Christ's name, and we are only servants of his own majesty.

Elders, as we do our pastoral care we must listen humbly to the needs and wishes of the other. But you and I are also given the authority to proclaim—to announce reconciliation, to require fidelity, to demand justice.

With the Spirit, from now on, Jesus and those who follow him are blessed and charged with the mission: to declare and embody God's reign; for as Jesus is the Son, the Beloved, we are the Beloved Children of God.

Elton W. Brown

Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday and a great day for us to celebrate the tearing open of the heavens. The Gospel of Mark gives us a moment to taste and see and hear the goodness of the Lord. I encourage you this week to watch for evidence of the love of God. These are days to shout hallelujah or “praise God.” The heavens have been torn open, and this is a day to bask in the love the heavens reveal in the Son, the Beloved. **Ted A. Smith**

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